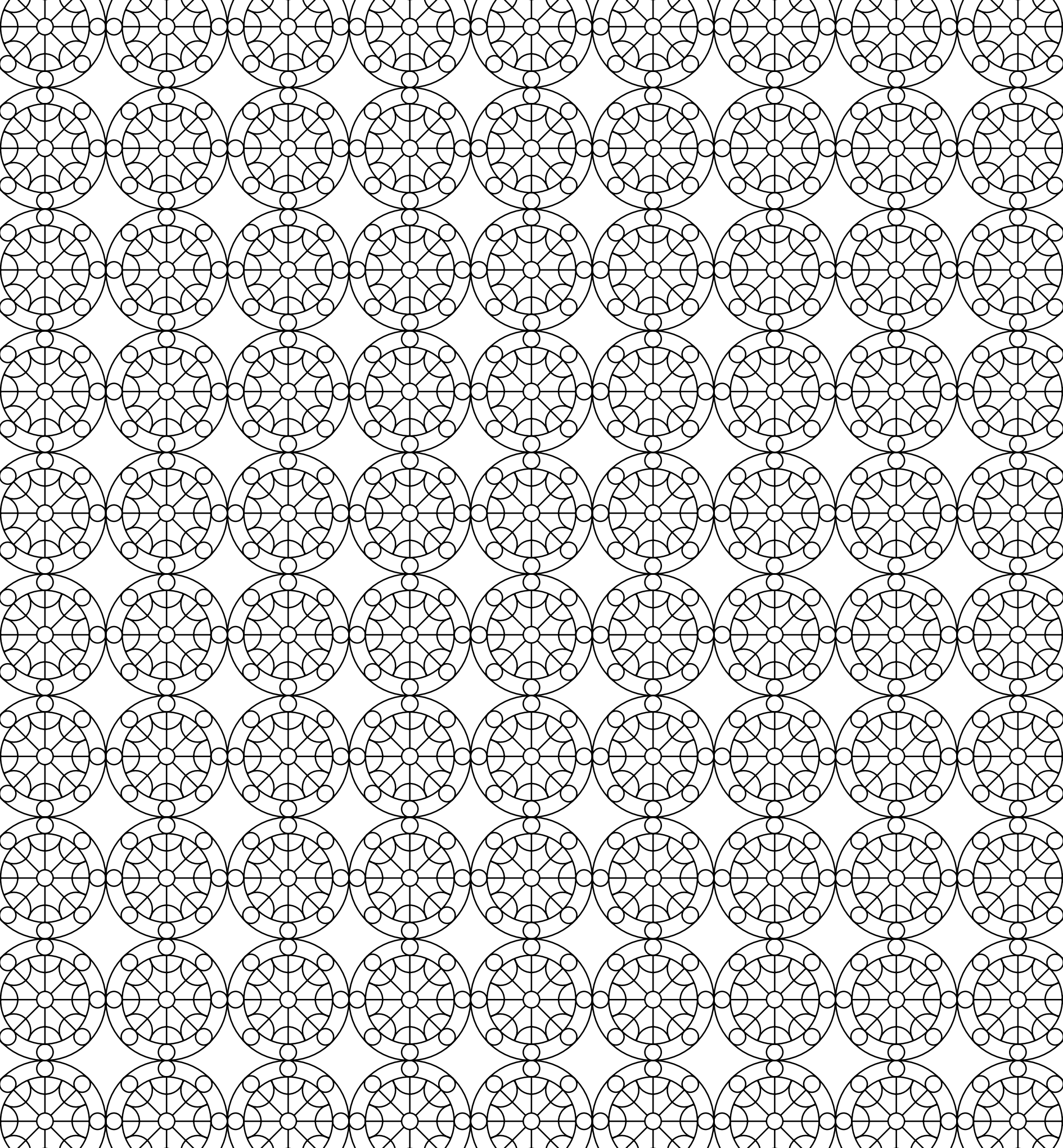




IBRAHIM MOHAMED JAIDAH

QATARI STYLE

HIRMER



IBRAHIM MOHAMED JAIDAH

QATARI STYLE

HIRMER

DEDICATION

To all young and emerging Qatari interior designers.
I hope that this book will serve them as a reference
to further develop a contemporary Qatari interior style.

To our ancestors who travelled the world
and brought back from their trips the elements of
foreign styles that have been embedded in our culture
and have become an integrated part of it.





[ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS](#)
[INTRODUCTION](#)

[INFLUENCES AND ELEMENTS OF STYLE](#)

[TRADITIONAL](#)

[RADWANI HOUSE](#)
[AL MANA MAJLIS](#)
[BOUHASHIM ALSAID MAJLIS](#)
[SH. FAISAL BIN QASSIM MUSEUM](#)

[TRANSITIONAL](#)

[ALFARDAN TRADITIONAL HOUSE](#)
[AL NAJADA HOTEL](#)
[BIN JELMOOD HOUSE](#)
[COMPANY HOUSE](#)
[EASAR CAFÉ](#)
[AL NOUKHAZA RESTAURANT](#)
[MERZAM CAFÉ](#)
[AL MENA RESTAURANT](#)
[COAST CAFÉ](#)
[HABAT REEH](#)
[AL BARANDA RESTAURANT](#)
[AHL LAWAL](#)

[CONTEMPORARY](#)

[AL JASRA HOTEL](#)
[AL MIRQAB HOTEL AND THEATRE](#)
[ARUMAILAH HOTEL](#)
[AL SHARQ VILLAGE & SPA](#)

[APPENDIX](#)

[GLOSSARY](#)
[COLOPHON AND IMAGE CREDITS](#)



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my mother: I am forever indebted.
Thank you for teaching me how to dream.

To my wife and my children: I am very grateful for
your continuous and unconditional love and support.

This book would not have been possible without
the support and input of the Qatari community.

While researching for this book many new
friendships and relationships have been forged,
and I take this opportunity to thank individuals who have
so graciously granted me access to their private space
and agreed to have it featured in this book.

I am appreciative of the support from institutions
such as Sh. Faisal Bin Qassim Museum and Msheireb
Museums, that have supported our process.

I am thankful to my team from AEB
who supported me with their dedicated work.

No sections of the book were neglected,
and they paid attention to every detail with a keen eye
to make the publishing of this manuscript possible.



INTRODUCTION

This book stems from my personal interest in the Qatari architecture, interiors, and design that are rooted in our local traditions and culture.

After graduating abroad and returning home to start my career as an architect, I was surprised to find that the architecture of Qatar was seldom documented. Consequently, I started recording old buildings. Twelve years of research resulted in my first published manuscript titled "History of Qatari Architecture 1800 1950", which introduces a collection of buildings from Qatar dating from the period before the discovery of oil. It became an academic reference for vernacular Qatari architecture.

In this book, my intention is to create another reference to our traditions, but this time to the interior design tendencies in Qatar. Unlike my first publication, this volume takes the reader on a journey of style. The first section of the book reveals the traditional style derived from the social, economic, and geographical influences in the region. It does not take us to the very beginning of the history of Qatar, but rather to a particular point in time in the early twentieth century, before the discovery of oil. It features the style of the interiors of our grandparents' generation and showcases a design that reflects and evokes our true vernacular culture and identity. The first section focuses on the typical traditional houses that have disappeared over time and are now mostly preserved in museums, in addition to *mayālis* that are functional until this day.

The second section of the book takes us on a journey through the style that evolved in Qatar after the discovery

of oil until the turn of the new century. As the local economy changed, the local style adapted to new variables, while retaining reminiscences of the pearl diving and commodity trading of the past. This new style, born in the transition between traditional and modern, borrows from the traditional Qatari style and way of living and translates into the modern era. I found that it is best portrayed in a private house that is kept for the owner's guests and visitors to the family farm, and in some public spaces such as restaurants and museums.

The third section features the contemporary style that was further influenced by the new, more globalized, realities of Qatar. It showcases hotels that reinterpret the vernacular Qatari everyday elements to create a contemporary style with a vibrant local identity. We learn from this section that the contemporary style of Qatar is strongly influenced by the traditional style but is reinterpreted in a way that suits the needs of a modern lifestyle.

The purpose of this book is to document the Qatari interior style, one that was born out of, transformed by, and exists within the fast-changing socio-economic context. I hope that I have succeeded in recording some of the fast-disappearing trends of interior design in Qatar that will remain for future generations at least in manuscript form, and that this will enable them to refer back to their roots. We aim to provide the new generation with a seed to research the character of Qatari interior design and to create their own contemporary Qatari style that is based on their revived identity.



INFLUENCES AND ELEMENTS OF STYLE

Qatar's history as a state is brief in a much larger regional context, but its name, Katara, is over 1800 years old and is one of the oldest names in the region. Qatar's significantly longer history before its statehood shaped much of its local cultural heritage. In its more recent history, and especially during the twentieth century, Qatar witnessed unprecedented economic development as a result of the discovery of oil which influenced all spheres of the socio-cultural life of the local population. Although this book attempts to explain the style that evolved just before, around and after that event, it is evident that Qatari style is constantly adapting to the currents of change. Various migrations, Qatar's unique geographic location, past trading history, the spread of Islam, and sea travels have had an impact on Qatari style which became an interesting combination of the local elements and those that were imported based on the population's perceptions of different places in the world.

Before the discovery of oil, Qatari style was humble in its decorations, color, and even forms. More intricate façade carvings, decorative ceilings, and decorative wooden features were limited to the style of those of a higher social status: members of the royal family and pearl and commodities merchants. During this period, culture was shaped by the effect of the geography of the place: its unique climate, resources, and proximity to ancient civilizations. For a long time before the discovery of oil, the inhabitants of Qatar inhabited both the deserts and seashores and would very often move with the changing seasons. The sea and desert environment influenced the vernacular design in numerous ways. The temporary tent settlements of the desert nomads were made

from materials readily available to them. Women would spin camel, sheep, and goat hair on spindles and would weave black and white textiles for the *bayt al shaar*, or would color the wool with dyes they could gather from various plants in their immediate surroundings to weave *sadw* fabric. This was used for furnishings and allowed women to weave their own visual language, represented in a series of geometric pictograms that when put together tell a story. By comparison, those who lived near the seashore did so in the areas where the sea was rich in pearls, since pearling was the most valuable commodity available to the people of Qatar. They lived in structures that were made of the limestone and dolomite which were available resources for building. These settlements, pale in color, blended into the desert environment, and created the basis for the traditional Qatari architecture. Trading and access to the sea influenced Qatari style with numerous imported construction materials, such as *danāshil*, and a variety of everyday objects that were brought from abroad.

Due to its geographical position, Qatar was located on a number of sea and land trade routes, which further influenced the availability of construction materials. After the spread of Islam, the Arabian Gulf region established trade relations by the sea with the coasts of East Africa, Zanzibar, India, and Southeast Asia. For sea travelers, the Qatari coast had certain advantages: the deeper water areas around it, which allowed the ships to set sail when the tide was high; and the availability of fresh water and dates. Accordingly, many sea travelers who moored their ships for repairs here came ashore in Qatar bringing along some of their cargo for trading.¹ In addition to the sea

routes, the prominent land trade routes through Qatar were those between Oman, Yemen, and Iraq. The mostly commonly traded materials on both routes were spices, wood, cotton, silk, paper, and musk; and as a result, the inhabitants of Qatar had access to the materials passing through their lands.² Wood, which was essential for construction, was scarce and much valued, so that it had to be imported. It is said that when a family chose to resettle, they would dismantle the *danāshil* and reuse them for building their new houses as they were too valuable to be left behind. Although traditional Qatari houses were simple and inherently minimalist, the trade-route location resulted in imported functional and decorative items such as *anādyq imbaīyt* and *kūrāfi* being quickly adapted and becoming an integral part of the local culture.

In addition to tradesmen who were temporary settlers in those lands, Qatari style was directly influenced by more permanent migrations, economic or other, that affected Qatar's socio-cultural mix. The eighteenth-century migration within the Middle Eastern region and Persia saw many skilled sailors and merchants settle in Qatar from the Arabian Peninsula,³ bringing with them the Najdi style (prominent in the Najd region). During the same time the entire Arabian Gulf witnessed movements of people in all directions throughout the Arab and Persian sides of the Gulf as a result of the religious, political, and economic changes in the area.² Many Arabs settled along the coast of Persia and later returned to their homelands, bringing with them new building techniques and decorative items. Traces of the Persian influence, such as the colorful pastoral imagery of open green fields and colorful peacocks, are still seen today in Qatar.

Additionally, for many decades, Qatar lay on the Indian Ocean slave-trading route and the majority of enslaved people were brought from Africa and Southeast Asia. When the slave trade was abolished by the British authority in the region in the twentieth century, some of the former slaves became integrated into Qatari society. As a result, they taught the locals some of their traditions, songs, and crafts that became part of the local culture.

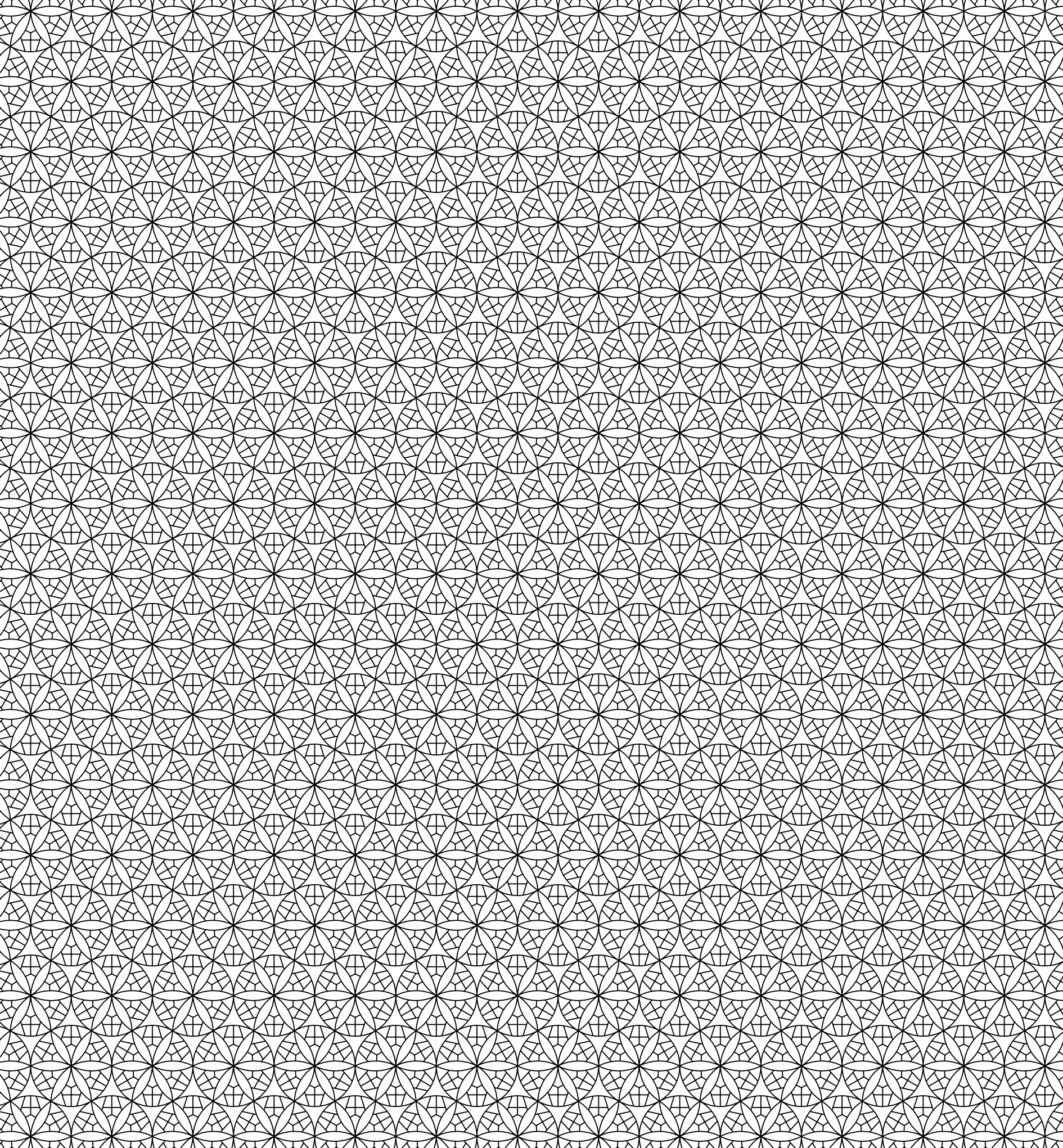
The discovery of oil in the mid-twentieth century has had not only an economic impact on Qatar, but also made a significant socio-cultural impression. During this period the Qatari style was influenced by a fascination with the other worlds with which the oil revenues brought the local community into contact, since the local population was not only able to travel, but workers and experts from all over the world also arrived to help in the development process. This phase witnessed cross-border influences with the Levant, North Africa, India, and the West. The Qatari style became an interesting combination of elements that the local community had seen in different places in the world. The transitional era still maintained the aesthetics of the local vernacular but with the introduction of luxury materials and everyday and decorative objects. As stated above, some of these luxury items were present in the pre-oil period in houses of more affluent families, but in a simpler manner. During the transitional period the luxury objects became omnipresent and reflected collections brought back by travelers. Vibrant colors and images of lush greenery and animals that we see depicted on the walls and some items of furniture were valued as they were lacking in the Qatari harsh desert environment. This continued one of the

most important dynamics of local design, which is the contrast between the vibrant and pale colors in the interiors. Even though Qatar was rapidly moving forward with influences from a much larger global context, a strong presence of Indian style was evident. The definition of style and memories of the generation that shaped the style of the transitional period were reminiscent of the pearl trade with maharajas from the Indian subcontinent from the pre-oil period.

At the turn of the twenty-first century, when Qatar witnessed true developmental prosperity, we see the shift to a revival of the traditional vernacular style. Taking elements from the local traditional style and implementing them into the current socio-cultural mix using state-of-the-art technologies resulted in an interesting contempo-

rary Qatari style. Here, we see the fusion of both worlds, local and global, creating a new style direction. It is a style that is defined by the simplicity of traditional form and color that is coupled with global design trends. This is the style that has emerged since the Qatari nation learnt to quickly adapt and accommodate the global influence, but at the same time appreciate their own heritage. This is the ancestors' legacy to the current generation, and this generation's legacy to their children.

- 1 دراسات في التاريخ الاقتصادي لمنطقة الخليج في 2011
- العصور الوسطى، سيف بن شاهين بن خلف المريخي، الزخرفة الجبسية في الخليج ، محمد على عبد الله، 1985
- 3 Qatar Enchantment of the World, Terri Willis, 2004



TRADITIONAL



THE QATARI

Saharan environment is not a colorful one. The dominant colors of the environment are the yellow of the desert sand, the teal of the sea, the brown of the cattle and the short-lived green of the few trees. However, the interiors of Qatari traditional houses contrast with the external environment. Bright colors dominate the textiles. The *sadw*, traditionally woven by women from goat, sheep and camel hair, is in vivid colors. Women would draw inspiration from folklore stories and their immediate surroundings and would create geometric pictograms, weaving their own stories into the *sadw* fabric. Furthermore, the traditional dresses worn by women under their black *abā āt* were also equally colorful, mostly in floral patterns and for those from more affluent backgrounds embroidered in silver or golden threads. The brightly-colored interiors and garments compensated for the paucity of colors in the environment. Other items in the house were left in their natural colors like *a īr*, made of dried palm reeds and *basjīl*, made of imported bamboo.

The courtyards of Qatari houses were not always enhanced with decorative items. It was said that you were lucky if there was a single tree in your courtyard. Thus, the builders of that time, *asātidhah*, decorated the courtyards using wall carvings. These carvings were their version of landscaping in the harsh environment of the desert.

The changing seasons played a considerable role in the daily lives of Qataris in the pre-oil period. Each space within the house was designated for a season. In the winter, the ground floor rooms were ideal; during the warmer months, the *līwān* was preferred as it offered enough shade and breeze while daily household chores were carried out. While the *līwān* was used for daily activities, the roofs of the houses were used for sleeping when darkness would offer sufficient privacy.

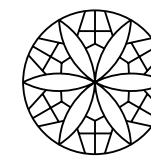
In general, most rooms in a traditional Qatari house would be used for multiple purposes. We are told that the

maylis was a place for adults to use for socializing during the day, and by night was a place for the younger generation of the family to sleep.

The *asātidhah* would organize open and closed spaces of the house to allow maximum protection from the intense sun and to take full advantage of prevailing winds. While traditional houses expanded organically as the family grew, the familiarity with the seasonal changes and the environment was fundamental and this knowledge was passed from one generation of *asātidhah* to the next.

In principle, the traditional Qatari house is organized around a central open courtyard, the *awsh*. There would be one main entrance to the courtyard, from where all other spaces were accessible. Living spaces were multi-purpose single or double-storey blocks where all openings faced the courtyard. The courtyard offered an outdoor space for family members to go about their lives with complete privacy. The *maylis* was the only part of the house that had windows overlooking the street. It was also the only part of the house accessible directly from the street so that visiting men would not disturb the privacy of other family members.

Although the traditional Qatari house is planned in a specific manner, certain architectural elements of the house were also influenced by the habits of its residents. For example, people traditionally sat and slept on *dawāshig* on the floor. Therefore, in most seating areas, including the *mayālis*, windows are positioned very close to the floor, allowing for the maximum breeze to get in. The traditional way of building also allowed for certain fixed elements, such as *rūshanāt*, which were both practical and decorative. They were used as shelves for various everyday objects, while from an architectural perspective, these recesses were necessary to lighten the weight of the walls as structures went up without any structural beams.



RADWANI HOUSE

Radwani House is the one of the very few surviving examples of an original traditional Qatari house. The house was renovated as a part of the Msheireb Downtown Doha urban regeneration project, and is now part of the Msheireb Museums. These comprise four historic houses located in the old commercial center of Doha, Msheireb; they honor Qatar's unique socio-cultural development and tell the story of and about the people of Qatar. Radwani House is a living museum and it recreates a traditional setting for Qatari everyday family life in the early to mid-twentieth century.

The house was first built in the 1920s and has undergone a number of renovations since then. The living quarters are arranged around the *awsh* with *lawāwīn* wrapping around. During the latest renovation, a much older structure was uncovered under a part of the house and now forms a part of the museum's exhibition. The remainder of the space displays the family room, kitchen and bedrooms, all exhibiting a collection of everyday objects and furniture from that period. The *awsh* at the Radwani House contains a single tree and is covered in seashells, as most of the courtyards were back in the day to minimize the dust.

Here we see typical floor seating made up of floor mattresses, *dawāshig*, with pillows as the back rests, *masānid*. In the center of the seating area is an arrangement for serving coffee displayed on two round *sufar*. It is tradition to serve Arabic coffee when greeting people

during formal and informal events. It is a way of acknowledging that someone is your guest and is considered a means of opening a conversation. Adjacent to the main living room is a small kitchen that displays *ra á*, *a ṭr*, *jafīr*, burlap sacks containing various grains, and a selection of cooking pots. The cooking pots were generally very large because the extended family used to live in the same house. Traditionally, rice was the basis for most meals. Fish and meat would be added according to availability.

In evidence here are also traditional roofing comprising of *danāshil* and *bāsīl*, and wall recesses *rūshanāt*. *Rūshanāt* are used as shelving and to hold everyday items such as perfume bottles, especially the metal elongated rose water bottles, *mirāshīh*. In Qatar, perfuming clothes is traditionally carried out by absorbing the smoke of the *bukhūr* from the *mibkharah*. Clothes were placed on the wooden structure, *midkhan*, and *bukhūr* would be burned in the *mibkharah* underneath.

One other element to note in Radwani House is the *yīlah*. This is the clay pot usually placed on the *līwān* that would contain drinking water. The porous material of the pot allows droplets of water to penetrate, so when the wind blows it cools down the whole jar. Therefore, the temperature of the water inside is cooler than outside. The older generation still tells stories about how the pots had to be tapped a few times to scare any worms or insects away before opening it for drinking.